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23 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
24 FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA  
25 SAN FRANCISCO DIVISION

26 AMERICAN FEDERATION OF  
27 GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO, et  
28 al.,

Plaintiffs,

v.

DONALD J. TRUMP, in his official capacity  
as President of the United States, et al.,

Defendants.

Case No. 3:25-cv-03698-SI

**DECLARATION OF DON L.  
NEUBACHER**

**DECLARATION OF DON L. NEUBACHER**

I, Don L. Neubacher, declare as follows:

1. I am over 18 years of age and competent to give this declaration. This declaration is based on my personal knowledge, information, and belief.

2. I am a Board Member of the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks ("Coalition"). I was the Superintendent at Yosemite National Park between 2010 and 2016, and the Superintendent of Point Reyes National Seashore between 1995 and 2010. My 36-year career with the National Park Service ("NPS"), which is an agency within the Department of the Interior ("DOI"), also included appointments at Glacier Bay National Park and the Denver Service Center. I am providing this declaration in my role as a Coalition Board Member.

3. The Coalition is a non-profit organization made up of over 4,000 members, all of whom are current, former, and retired employees and volunteers of NPS. Together, they have accumulated over 50,000 years of experience caring for America's most valuable natural and cultural resources. The Coalition's goal is to support the preservation and protection of the National Park System and the mission-related programs of NPS to ensure the survival of the park system for generations to come.

4. Our members and their families are regular and avid users of the National Park System, who will be adversely affected by any degradation of the parks or the NPS programs to preserve and protect the parks, provide visitor access, and ensure public safety. Our members are also avid users of other public assets for recreation and engage in conservation activities, such as preserving marine sanctuaries and national forests.

5. Because of the severe, chaotic, and unsystematic reduction in park staffing currently underway, there is a significant leadership vacuum in NPS and a lack of available support and expertise from regional offices for unforeseen situations such as wildfires, law enforcement incidents, and public health occurrences. Of the seven regional directors throughout the nation, only two of these leadership positions are currently filled. Regional directors play a critical role in the management of the park system by providing management oversight and assistance to park units, especially small park units with limited staff and expertise. Similarly, of

1 the 400 Park units, more than 100 superintendent positions are estimated to be currently vacant.  
2 As a superintendent, I had to provide oversight regarding park-wide emergencies, including visitor  
3 fatalities and critical situations, almost daily. These include: public health issues such as norovirus  
4 outbreaks, storm-related flooding, large tree falls, wildfires, trail closures, visitor facilities, and  
5 rock falls that close major entrance roads. These major issues in parks require a competent and  
6 experienced superintendent to ensure they can function effectively during these crises. For  
7 example, visitors may need to be evacuated, or additional funding may be necessary to reduce the  
8 impact of the incident. With the blanket hiring freeze, senior-level positions will likely remain  
9 vacant, and parks will not be able to meet the challenges these critical incidents pose.

10 6. Even before this disorganized reorganization and severe staffing reductions, the  
11 National Park Service (NPS) had been facing a dire staffing crisis. The NPS has arrived at a  
12 crossroads in its ability to protect national parks and safely serve the American public. There are  
13 insufficient staff to provide basic services to the 332 million annual park visitors. Since 2010, park  
14 staffing levels have been reduced by 19%, a loss of roughly 2,500 full-time equivalents due to  
15 decreasing budgets. During the same period, Congress added 41 new park units to the system, a  
16 significant workload. Annual visitation to America's cherished parks has grown by 15% to a  
17 record 332 million visitors in 2024, an increase of 20 million from just 2022 levels. This increase  
18 in visitation has caused staff to be stretched to their limits without the significant impacts of the  
19 new staff cuts and proposed reductions in force (RIF).

20 7. I have seen a report that was published on March 10, 2025 in The Hill that the  
21 White House instructed NPS to cut 30% payroll of its 16,000 permanent employees, or 4,800 NPS  
22 jobs. A true and correct copy of the March 10 article, which is also available at [Trump](#)  
23 [administration eyes 30 percent payroll reduction at National Park Service](#), is attached hereto as  
24 Exhibit A. In the article, when asked about the cuts, the DOI's Spokesperson Elizabeth Peace  
25 originally said, "We do not comment on specific personnel matters," but then continue to connect  
26 "reducing unnecessary positions" to "President Donald J. Trump's leadership . . . to right-size the  
27 federal workforce." Peace did not deny the authenticity or accuracy of the White House directive.  
28

1           8.       According to a separate article published last week by Government Executive on  
2 April 23, a large scale RIF in NPS appears imminent as NPS employees are about to receive an  
3 email to submit resumes to DOI so they can see if they are eligible for other NPS positions if they  
4 are laid off as part of a RIF process. A true and correct copy of the April 23 article, which is also  
5 available at [https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2025/04/interior-solicits-employees-resumes-](https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2025/04/interior-solicits-employees-resumes-preparation-widespread-layoffs/404786/)  
6 [preparation-widespread-layoffs/404786/](https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2025/04/interior-solicits-employees-resumes-preparation-widespread-layoffs/404786/), is attached hereto as Exhibit B. This is after 1,100 NPS  
7 employees opted for the second deferred resignation program.

8           9.       The April 23 article also reports that beginning on May 4, DOI will “centralize  
9 many of its functions, including human resources, IT, finance, contracting, communications,  
10 international affairs, and other administrative roles, away from individual bureaus and into the  
11 central part of the department in a process.” When I was Superintendent at Yosemite, NPS tried a  
12 similar centralization of human resources functions; HR staff were moved out of park areas, and  
13 regional offices’ functions were centralized in Colorado. It led to inefficiency, morale issues, and  
14 complaints by field staff due to delays in hiring; certain functions, such as hiring and processing,  
15 were restored to regional offices and assigned to parks. But that was only one function being  
16 performed in regional offices that was transferred. DOI is trying to have all agencies bring all  
17 regional support functions, IT, HR, communications, and contracting to DOI all at one time. Based  
18 on my 36-year career, such a reorganization is likely to create significant problems and impair  
19 services because park areas have different needs and proximity to these areas matters. For  
20 example, knowledge of specific park functions and areas such as IT or contracting needs can only  
21 be fully met if these staff have in-depth knowledge of the parks and their specific needs. The  
22 impact of the disarray will fall hardest on the smaller parks with limited resources, such as Rosie  
23 the Riveter National Historical Park in Richmond, California, Eugene O’Neill National Historic  
24 Site in Danville, California, and John Muir National Historic Site in Martinez, California. Smaller  
25 parks lack the necessary engineering, scientific, construction management, IT, and HR staff on  
26 site, and must currently seek assistance from the regional offices that offer that support. For  
27 example, regional offices now provide detailed expertise in contracting, engineering, compliance,  
28 and project management to complete building rehabilitation. Without the expertise and project

1 assistance, historic buildings and other facilities, for example, will not get regular maintenance and  
2 upkeep, and once deterioration occurs, it cannot be reversed easily. Another former park ranger  
3 makes that point in an MSN article about the NPS RIF that I saw on April 24, 2025. A true and  
4 correct copy of that MSN article, which is also available at [‘It's devastating’: Virginia park rangers](#)  
5 [warn of lasting damage from federal cuts](#), is attached hereto as Exhibit C.

6 10. Based on my experience as a park Superintendent, eliminating so many NPS  
7 employees at once will immediately adversely impact the parks and park visitors, such as  
8 Coalition members. If RIF eliminates fee collector positions, there will mile-long lines to enter the  
9 parks. Traffic will not improve once inside the park and visitors will be frustrated trying to find  
10 parking, even if a space is available. For example, at Yosemite, the park will likely have to stop  
11 specific functions, close park areas, or limit entrance times or the number of visitors. There is no  
12 way to accommodate current rising visitation levels without additional staff support during the  
13 upcoming peak season. With fewer staff, they will not be able to implement any restriction system  
14 that would assist with the flow of visitors to make sure that the experience is safe and memorable,  
15 and visitors are not stuck in traffic jams and frustrated when unable to find parking. In addition,  
16 without adequate staff to manage visitors, the park will likely exceed visitor capacities set by the  
17 approved Merced and Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River Plans. These capacities were set to ensure  
18 the outstanding river values, including water quality and meadow health, are not degraded.  
19 Predictably, if visitors continue to come in larger numbers during peak times, there will be lasting  
20 resource damage and possibly some irreversible damage.

21 11. Yosemite receives annual visitation of over 4 million people. Point Reyes receives  
22 about 2.3 million annual visitors. Visitors have a human impact, but many can be mitigated. At all  
23 parks, resource management and science staff provide monitoring of keystone species,  
24 environmental parameters, and the status of cultural resources such as historic buildings and  
25 archeological sites. These staff ensure the preservation of species and nationally important  
26 resources as required by statute and NPS policy. They also provide critical knowledge, skills, and  
27 abilities for restoration, adaptation, and mitigation efforts to reduce or eliminate threats to our  
28 cultural and natural heritage within the NPS. If a RIF removes these critical staff, there will likely

1 be significant impacts on endangered and other special status species, ecosystems that will not be  
2 restored, and visitor impacts that cannot be mitigated. At Yosemite, for example, the NPS  
3 resources employees ensure the health and preservation of Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep, Sierra  
4 Nevada red fox, and red-legged frogs, and many other special status species as required by law.  
5 At Point Reyes, the NPS employees protect 30 federally listed threatened and endangered species  
6 of animals, and six federally listed threatened or endangered species of plants exist within the  
7 Seashore. The parks require a full resource staff to manage, monitor, and mitigate threats to these  
8 species and to allow careful access to visitors. Overall, 1,000 federally listed threatened and  
9 endangered species live in more than 200 of the around 400 units of the NPS. The RIF has the  
10 potential to decimate resource management efforts across the country.

11 12. During the partial government shutdown from December 2018 to January 2019,  
12 Coalition members saw National Park System visitors trample sensitive ecological areas with their  
13 vehicles and dogs. This was a direct result of having inadequate staff present to protect endangered  
14 species.

15 13. Regarding Coalition members' enjoyment of marine sanctuaries, many of those  
16 sanctuaries are protected by the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic & Atmospheric  
17 Administration's (NOAA) Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, managing enormous swathes of  
18 ocean around the United States, from Hawaii and American Samoa to the Florida Keys, as well as  
19 the Great Lakes region. These areas are often adjacent to national park units such as Channel  
20 Islands National Park and Point Reyes National Seashore. Protecting the sanctuaries requires  
21 having specialized staff who are experts in marine ecosystems. Without sufficient numbers of  
22 knowledgeable staff, NOAA will not be able to preserve these biodiverse areas, which could then  
23 cause the degradation of the marine ecosystems and harm rare species that visitors can view in  
24 those important ocean systems. Reduced staff also means there will likely be fewer hours or days  
25 for Coalition members to visit the recreational areas in the marine sanctuaries.

26 14. If large-scale RIFs occur, NPS will have more limited ranger-led tours, guided  
27 walks and educational programs. I expect the park hours to visitor facilities may need to be  
28 reduced. It will take longer to enter national parks, there will be more traffic once inside, and it

1 will take longer to find parking. Emergency medical services, search and rescue could be impacted  
2 by reductions in trained staff, as well as by the absence of top leadership to manage the situation.  
3 Longer response times to emergencies will be likely in the event of large-scale RIFs. And visitors  
4 will find it more difficult to locate knowledgeable staff to answer questions about where it is safe  
5 to swim, or what local flora and fauna are safe, which will put visitors at risk.

6 15. The anticipated large-scale RIF will have an untenable impact on the workers who  
7 remain at the NPS. They will have to work very long hours without adequate direction in parks  
8 that lack superintendents, and they will have reduced support from the regional offices as other  
9 staff's employment is terminated, some staff relocate to DOI headquarters in Washington, D.C.,  
10 and others quit. Morale will be dismal.

11 16. In the very short term, the employees who receive a RIF notice for work at parks in  
12 remote areas, such as Yosemite National Park or the national parks in Alaska, will likely need to  
13 immediately relocate to other geographic areas to look for new employment. This will be a  
14 hardship because many park employees are in park housing and would therefore need to move into  
15 private housing. Even if the RIF is later ruled invalid, it would be highly unlikely that the same  
16 trained NPS employees who are subjected to the RIF could be rehired later because they will  
17 likely relocate themselves and their families to a new area and job.

18 17. The Reorganization Plan is having an immediate adverse effect on the Coalition's  
19 ability to provide core services to members and to accomplish its mission. We are spending time  
20 raising awareness about what is happening at the DOI, contacting and educating legislators about  
21 our concerns with the DOI Plans, and receiving an influx of calls and emails regarding the future  
22 of the National Park Service. The RIF will redirect the Coalition's attention even further away  
23 from visitor services and public safety. The RIF and reorganization will result in a drastically  
24 reduced permanent workforce, resulting in a dramatic loss of public services and access. Our  
25 members will not be able to enjoy the parks as fully in the short term, but in the long term, the  
26 biological and cultural resources of the park will degrade.

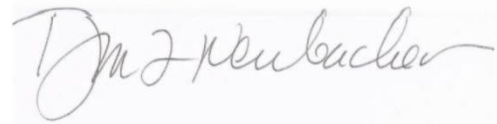
27 18. If the current plans regarding the reorganization and drastic downsizing of NPS  
28 were published in the Federal Register for notice and comment, the Coalition would take the time

1 to comment on these Reorganization and RIF Plans because they would be catastrophic for the  
2 park system in irreversible ways and significantly interfere with the visitor experience, including  
3 for Coalition members. The Coalition provided extensive comments during the public comment  
4 period for the 2018 NPS reorganization plan during the first President Trump Administration.

5 19. If parks are closed or less available to the public and poorly staffed, there will be  
6 significant negative economic impacts on regional economies. National parks across the United  
7 States generated over \$55 billion in economic benefits in 2024.

8  
9 I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States that the foregoing is  
10 true and correct. Executed April 27, 2025, in Point Reyes Station, California.

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Don L. Neubacher



# Exhibit A

TRENDING: CANADA TARIFFS GREENLAND ELECTION DOW PLUNGES NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SPONSORED: CONTENT FROM V

JUST IN

Ann Coulter questions arrest of Columbia protester on free speech grounds  
MEDIA | 1 MINUTE AGO

Climate change could be threatening satellites as they orbit in space: Study  
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Trump responds to market meltdown  
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Trump eyes slashing ACA enrollment period  
NEWS | 1 HOUR AGO

McConnell criticizes and votes no on Trump Labor pick  
SENATE | 1 HOUR AGO

Senate confirms Lori Chavez-DeRemer as Labor secretary  
SENATE | 1 HOUR AGO

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TECHNOLOGY | 1 HOUR AGO

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STATE WATCH

# Trump administration eyes 30 percent payroll reduction at National Park Service

BY RACHEL FRAZIN - 03/10/25 6:14 PM ET

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The Trump administration is eyeing a 30 percent payroll reduction at the National Park Service, signaling big cuts at a high-profile government agency that could make headlines during the summer vacation season.

Managers were asked to put together plans to eliminate 30 percent of payroll, a former employee who had to put together one such plan told The Hill.

The reduction would be to payroll, meaning it would not necessarily lead to a 30 percent reduction in the National Park Service's staffing, since some workers earn more than others.

https://archive.ph/1Ow8o

1/8

Either way, it would be a significant cut that would be felt at the service, and, if they are among the places facing job cuts, could be noticed by visitors to places such as Yellowstone National Park, Glacier National Park and other sites managed across the country by the National Park Service.

The ex-employee who spoke with The Hill said such a reduction likely would be felt in the near term with potential losses for rangers and janitors — and in the long term, with conservation projects potentially put at risk.

Workforce reductions have been discussed across the government as Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency look to make large cuts across federal agencies and departments.

This is the first time the 30 percent reduction plan for the National Park Service — which manages all national parks, most national monuments and other historic U.S. properties — has been reported.

The National Park Service has more than 20,000 employees, including both permanent and seasonal workers when parks staff up for the busy summer season. The source familiar with the planned cuts said they would be made to the 16,000 members of the permanent National Park Service workforce.

The Interior Department, which houses the National Park Service, declined to comment on any specific workforce reductions but acknowledged the Trump administration's efforts to reduce costs to taxpayers.

"We do not comment on specific personnel matters," spokesperson J. Elizabeth Peace said.

"Under President Donald J. Trump's leadership, the Department is working to right-size the federal workforce, cut bureaucratic waste, and ensure taxpayer dollars are spent efficiently. By streamlining operations and reducing unnecessary positions, we are strengthening our ability to serve the public while making government more effective and accountable," she added.

CONTENT CONTINUES BELOW SURVEY

**What Do You Think?**



Trump administration says 30 percent payroll reduction at National Park Service

**Have you ever served on an executive board for a nonprofit organization and / or private company?**

- ☐ Yes, multiple times
- ☐ Just once
- ☐ Not yet, but I want to
- ☐ No, and I do not want to
- ☐ Other / Does not apply

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"We will continue working with the Department of Government Efficiency and other agencies to implement cost-saving measures that put taxpayers first while ensuring the responsible stewardship of America's natural and cultural resources," Peace said.

The National Park Service, like other parts of the federal government, has already seen workforce reductions through the elimination of probational employees. These federal workers held probationary status because they are new to their government jobs or positions. Some probationary workers, for example, are on that status because they were promoted to new positions.

The former employee said the cuts being planned at the National Park Service are a 30 percent total payroll cut, meaning they would include the probationary employees who were fired last month and would not be an additional 30 percent cut on top of them.

Managers were not given specific instructions on whom to cut, and each office was told to put together the list, according to the ex-staffer.

In addition, the person said the department is expected to shuffle around senior career officials who are part of the Senior Executive Service.

The anticipated cuts come as the Interior Department has already eliminated 2,300 positions, including 1,000 that were reported to be part of the Park Service.

President Trump and his allies have characterized the sweeping staff losses as efforts to cut down on fraud,

waste and abuse, and the president has said that more cuts are coming.

But others say the firings are disruptive to government function — and the lives of civil servants.

Cuts at the National Park Service have the potential to be politically unpopular, as these places are both pillars of local economies and treasured destinations by many Americans across the political spectrum.

At the same time, the cuts the Trump administration have promised have hit other parts of the government that can be politically sensitive, including [the Department of Veterans Affairs](#).

Some of these cuts have sparked worries from Republicans in Congress about how cuts are being made. Musk last week [reportedly battled](#) with Secretary of State Marco Rubio at a Trump Cabinet meeting over the nature of cuts to that department.

Parks advocates have decried plans to cut down the workforce.

“Local economies will be harmed if parks are not well managed due to lack of staffing or if they are closed,” Phil Francis, chair of the executive council of the Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks, said in an email.

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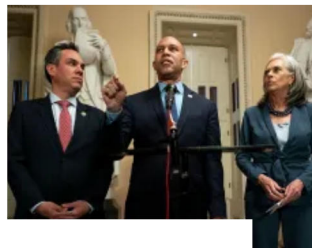


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# Exhibit B

## Government Executive

# Interior solicits employees' resumes in preparation for widespread layoffs

By Eric Katz

April 23, 2025

The Interior Department is asking its employees to turn over their resumes as it prepares to slash its workforce, with major changes expected in early May.

Interior will centralize many of its functions, including human resources, IT, finance, contracting communications, international affairs and other administrative roles, away from individual bureaus and into the central part of the department in a process expected to begin May 4, according to employees briefed on the plans. Layoffs, or reductions in force, are not likely to occur at that point, though they are expected in the coming weeks.

“The department continues to evaluate workforce optimization opportunities,” the U.S. Geological Survey said in an email to employees on Tuesday and obtained by *Government Executive*. “This includes plans for reductions-in-force.”

USGS noted that positions of the “high priority” to achieve the department’s mission, as well as those critical to public safety, would be exempted from the RIFs.

“As the department continues to plan for reductions-in-force to increase workforce efficiency, employees should proactively review their personnel records for accuracy,” USGS wrote. “Additionally, Human Resources is requesting an updated resume from all Interior employees.”

The National Park Service is expected to soon send out a similar email to all of its staff, according to an employee involved in those plans. Both NPS and USGS are asking employees to verify that all their personnel records are correct and up to date. They must also submit their resumes, ostensibly so their agencies can determine their eligibility for other positions if they are laid off.

Employees expressed concern about the request, however, saying the department could examine their resumes to determine which positions are mission-critical. Alyse Sharpe, an Interior spokesperson, said the department was adhering to guidelines as laid out by the Office of Personnel Management but had no further details on RIF plans at this time.

The Internal Revenue Service has also requested employees [turn over updated resumes](#) in preparation for widespread layoffs.

*Government Executive* [first reported on Interior's plan](#) to consolidate functions across the department earlier this month, which Interior Secretary Doug Burgum subsequently confirmed in a memorandum. Impacted entities will soon report directly to the secretary’s office, he said.

Burgum tapped the assistant secretary for policy, management budget, a role currently being filled by Tyler Hassen. Hassen previously served in the Department of Government Efficiency.

USGS, in its message to staff, noted it had offered several voluntary separation incentives to employees, including a second round of the “deferred resignation program” that enabled staff to sit on paid leave until they leave the agency by Sept. 30.

At NPS, 1,100 employees have signed up for the second DRP, according to an employee briefed on the figure. Due to Burgum's April 3 order requiring all National Parks and other NPS-managed properties remain open at their current hours unless top leadership approves of changes, however, half of those requests are currently pending further review. Already, staff and stakeholders are raising concerns about Burgum's demands.

Kristen Brengel, senior vice president of governmental affairs for the National Parks Conservation Association, called the order "reckless and out of touch," saying it was "setting up the Park Service for failure." She noted NPS has for years suffered from understaffing, which the Trump administration has compounded with freezes, separation incentives and expected layoffs.

"The administration is now tying their hands and forcing them to jump through bureaucratic hoops just to close a trail, campground or visitor center they believe poses a risk or can't be staffed," Brengel said of local park leadership.

The Park Service joins IRS and the Agriculture Department in potentially denying DRP applicants due to concerns mission-critical work would suffer. Multiple offices within USDA—which saw [16,000 employees accept the DRP](#)—have rejected employees applying for the program, such as the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service denying employees out of fear that critical losses among staff would hamper avian influenza response.

NPS human resources office, like others throughout Interior, is now combing through all employees' documentation to ensure the information is up to date "in preparation for the RIF," one employee said. HR staff are themselves preparing for the early May consolidation into central Interior, which, due to the condensed timeframe, has stoked concerns of a chaotic rollout as emails change and employees, potentially, get locked out of accounts.

"There are so many issues with that," one employee said of the current plans.

The agency will also engage in all of this work while entering its busiest HR time of the year, as it looks to hire thousands of seasonal staff in anticipation of its highest visitation period of the year.

That hiring will take place even as at least some NPS employees have been told to expect a third deferred resignation window next month.

USGS has seen 860 employees opt into the program, according to an employee briefed on that figure, and that number is expected to climb as those at least 40 years old have extra time to finalize their decisions. About two-thirds of the top 12 career USGS staff have opted to resign.

By Eric Katz

April 23, 2025

<https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2025/04/interior-solicits-employees-resumes-preparation-widespread-layoffs/404786/>



# Exhibit C



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'It's devastating': Virginia park rangers warn of lasting damage from federal cuts

Story by Madison Parlopiano | VCU Capital News Service • 5d •

5 min read

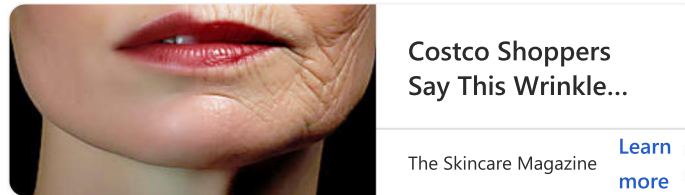


'It's devastating': Virginia park rangers warn of lasting damage from federal cuts

State's \$2.3B park economy faces staffing crisis

RICHMOND - Temperatures are warming, flowers are blooming and Virginia's peak park tourism seasons are ahead.

Travelers could find their plans affected, with funding and job cuts hitting the National Park Service. Virginia boasts several trails, parks and historic landmarks that fall under park service management which could be impacted. State officials hope park tourism stays strong because of the millions it generates, and park officials are trying to manage expectations with less resources.



What park visitors may find

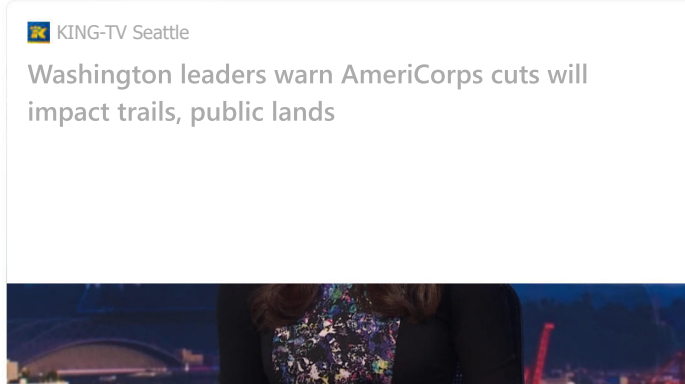
If staff is limited, ranger-led tours, guided walks and educational programs could be canceled. Hours of operation for these national parks may be reduced. Visitors could experience longer wait times and lines to enter the park with fewer staff to manage entrance stations.

Rangers are trained to perform emergency medical services, search and rescue, traffic stops and respond to various other safety concerns, according to [ranger activity reports](#). From July through September 2024, Shenandoah National Park rangers responded to 142 service calls, 23 medical events and 18 search and rescues.

Tourists may have to educate themselves on local flora and fauna, which could put themselves at risk, according to Ronan Connolly, who was formerly employed by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's park service.

"The effects of these cuts will be devastating to not only the park service, but also the public that enjoys these protected locations," Connolly stated in an email. "The effects will be felt nationwide and will impact the properties they maintain far after the Trump Administration has left office."

**Related video:** Washington leaders warn AmeriCorps cuts will impact trails, public lands (KING-TV Seattle)

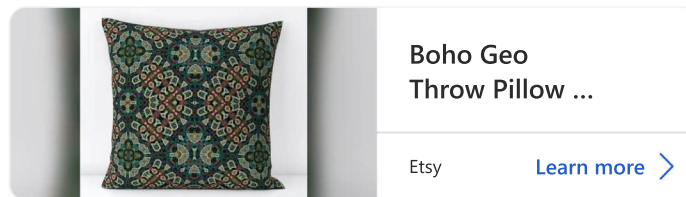


The park service hopes to ensure every visitor can still explore and enjoy [national parks](#)

"Our teams are dedicated to meeting the evolving needs of our visitors, ensuring memorable and meaningful experiences for all," the public relations team stated in response to a question about current conditions and staffing.

Many different positions were impacted, according to Bill Wade, who previously served as a superintendent of Shenandoah National Park. He is now the executive director of the Association of National Park Rangers, a nonprofit that supports park management and park rangers.

"It wasn't just one or two categories, although probably two categories that got hit the hardest across the service were the people who do staff the visitor centers, and you have the ranger-led programs and school groups and that sort of thing, and then the fee collectors," Wade said.



Around nine fee collector positions were cut at Shenandoah, according to Wade. Multiple custodial positions were also lost.

Wade is worried about a lot of the smaller parks that have historic buildings. Regular maintenance and upkeep is required, he said. If these buildings can't be maintained the effects could be devastating.

"They start to deteriorate and, you know, once they start to deteriorate, it's not easy to reverse that," Wade said.

The Virginia Tourism Corporation highlights and promotes tourist destinations around the state, including national parks. The organization is still promoting Virginia parks, while putting extra emphasis on the importance of "leave no trace," according to director of communications Juliana Thomas.

"So reminding visitors to dispose of their waste properly, pack it in, pack it out, and leave the areas exactly as they found them," Thomas said. "With potentially limited staff resources, we all need to do our part for the visitors who come after us."



National Park Service staff and funding cuts

NPS remains committed to preserving the natural and cultural resources it manages, while following orders.

"As part of the broader efforts led by the Department of the Interior under President Trump's leadership, we are implementing necessary

reforms to ensure fiscal responsibility, operational efficiency, and government accountability," NPS said in a statement.

An estimated 1,000 probationary park staff were fired in February, according to the [National Parks Conservation Association](#). Staff in the probationary period, which lasts a year on average, includes any recent hires and current or long-standing employees who were moved or promoted into a new position.

Approximately 63 park staff members were fired in Virginia, according to data from the [Resistance Rangers](#), a community of former park service employees, some retired and some who were recently fired. Fifteen were employed at Shenandoah.

Virginia tourism could suffer

Virginia is [No. 5 in the U.S.](#) when it comes to visitor spending, jobs supported, value added and economic output, according to National Park Services data.

Tourism dollars are important for the state. Visitors brought in over \$33.3 billion in 2023, according to [an older press release](#) from Gov. Glenn Youngkin and the Virginia Tourism Corporation.

"Our tourism industry is a crucial part of driving economic prosperity, providing jobs, building vibrant communities, and enhancing the quality of life for all Virginians," Youngkin stated.

The state's parks are a big attraction as over 23 million Virginia park visitors spent an estimated \$1.5 billion in 2023, according to the [park service](#). The impact directly benefits the parks, but also surrounding areas with money spent on camping, gas, groceries, hotels, recreational industries, restaurants, retail and transportation.

Park-related tourism spending supported over 21,000 jobs and \$769 million in labor income. Overall the economic output was [estimated](#) at \$2.3 billion for the Virginia economy. The number of jobs and money generated was up from the year before.

The staffing cuts to such an economic engine don't make sense, not when parks bring in an estimated [\\$55 billion](#) in economic returns throughout the country, according to Emily Douce, deputy vice president of government affairs at the National Parks Conservation Association.

"If it were a business, say like Disneyland or Disney World, if you had record-breaking visitation that brings in lots of money for the local economy, then you wouldn't be cutting staff," Douce said. "You would be increasing the amount of staff to ensure visitors have a great time."

She confirmed that without enough staff, park visitors could expect closed or poorly maintained bathrooms, overflowing trash cans, reduced hours and visitor centers, fewer open campgrounds and long lines at entrance gates.

Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior Doug Burgum sent out an order that requires all parks to get approval for park closures, according to Douce.

"So, it'll be interesting to see how they expect to do this with a severe reduction in the workforce," Douce said.

Seasonal workers cover many front-facing positions, like custodians, fee collectors and visitor educators, according to Douce. However, many jobs can't be covered by seasonal staff, like those that oversee the budgets, scientists and staff that monitor the wildlife and protect cultural resources.

Between firings and buyouts, the parks are being dismantled, she said.

"It's devastating to our national parks and they're in trouble," Douce said.

The funding for the park service primarily comes from Congress, according to [the National Park Foundation](#). Parks also receive funding through entrance and user fees, along with private philanthropy received by the foundation.

Capital News Service is a program of Virginia Commonwealth University's Robertson School of Media and Culture. Students in the program provide state government coverage for a variety of media outlets in Virginia.

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